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SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FM OKADA'S SEOUL VISIT

REF: A. TOKYO 291
[1](#)B. SEOUL 144

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) MOFAT's new Director-General for Northeast Asian Affairs, Chang Won-sam, told us the ROKG was very pleased with Japanese Foreign Minister Okada's annexation apology during his February 10-11 visit to Seoul. Chang said Okada had gone beyond the agreed-upon text by adding that Japan "should...never forget the feelings of the victims," an improvisation that had come across as sincere and had played well in the press. The DG confirmed that MOFAT was coordinating with the Japanese Embassy on how best to negotiate "sensitive" dates this year, including the March 1 Korean holiday commemorating the 1919 independence movement and the March 26 anniversary of the execution of nationalist hero An Jung-geun. A Japanese Embassy contact related that, over lunch with Okada, FM Yu had hinted that Japan should "voluntarily" decide to return hundreds of volumes of Chosun Dynasty royal court records currently held by the Imperial Household Agency. Proposed trilateral military consultations between Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing did not come up during Okada's visit, DG Chang claimed, adding that MOFAT had nothing to do with the proposal. End summary.

Additional Readout on Okada Visit

[1](#)2. (C) During an introductory call by POL M/C, MOFAT's new Director-General for Northeast Asian Affairs, Chang Won-sam, gave us additional details on the February 10-11 visit to Seoul of Japanese Foreign Minister Okada. Chang emphasized that the ROKG was very pleased with Okada's public apology for "the agony of people who lost their country and had their national pride harmed" as a result of Japan's forced annexation of Korea in 1910. Okada had gone beyond the agreed-upon text by adding that Japan "should...never forget the feelings of the victims." Okada's improvisation had come across as personal and sincere, Chang said, noting that the statement played well in both the ROK and Japanese press.

[1](#)3. (C) In a separate conversation, Japanese Embassy Political Counselor Matsuo Hirotaka seconded DG Chang's comments, noting the two sides had engaged in considerable discussion

about the content of Okada's apology. Working-level Japanese officials had initially balked at ROKG insistence that the statement explicitly use the word "victim," Matsuo said, but Okada himself decided to use the term. Echoing the readout received by Embassy Tokyo (ref A), Matsuo characterized the visit as a huge success and a "solid anchor peg" from which to move forward in the bilateral effort to transform ROK-Japan relations.

Warning: Bumpy Road Ahead

14. (C) Matsuo cautioned that, although close bilateral cooperation had succeeded in managing ROK anti-Japanese populism thus far, unexpected challenges were likely to arise throughout the year. To this end, the Japanese embassy had developed a very detailed calendar of dates and events to help them anticipate sensitive periods over the course of the anniversary year. DG Chang told us that MOFAT was coordinating with Matsuo and his colleagues on how best to negotiate these sensitive dates. The March 1 Korean national holiday commemorating the 1919 independence movement would be the next potential flashpoint, followed shortly thereafter by the March 26 100th anniversary of the execution of independence hero An Jung-geun. (Note: An is viewed as a Korean patriot for assassinating Japanese Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi to protest the Eulsa Treaty, which Japan used to effectively annex Korea.)

About Those Chosun Dynasty Court Records...

15. (C) Matsuo observed that the ROK side did not raise sensitive issues during Okada's official meetings, choosing to raise them informally instead. For example, over lunch Foreign Minister Yu mentioned press reports regarding the Imperial Household Agency's possession of cultural properties taken from Korea, particularly hundreds of volumes of Chosun Dynasty royal court records. Yu, a former ROK Ambassador to Japan, reportedly stated he did not want this to become a "diplomatic issue," emphasizing to Okada that he was raising the issue only in the "spirit of frank exchange." Matsuo commented that "in typical Asian fashion," Yu did not make any specific demands regarding the documents, instead hinting that Japan should voluntarily make its own "correct" decision on the issue. Matsuo said Okada punted, noting that the foreign ministry had to consult with the Imperial Household Agency on the possible return of the documents and explaining there were concerns in Tokyo about the precedent such a return might set.

China "Cool" On Trilateral Military Consultations

16. (C) Asked about media reports concerning proposed trilateral military consultations including China, Matsuo said it was a ROK initiative but he doubted the forum would ever come to fruition, because the Chinese were cool to the idea. DG Chang said the trilateral proposal was not discussed during Okada's visit and he was quick to deny any MOFAT involvement. He added that he understood the proposed forum would focus on mil-to-mil cooperation and not broader security issues. (Note: Ministry of National Defense Northeast Asia Division's LTC Kim Jong-bae told us that any trilateral discussions would not take place until the end of 2010 at the earliest. He also emphasized that the proposed consultations would be at the DG-level. End note.)
STEPHENS